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# AMERICAN STAINED GLASS.

## THIRD AND CONCLUDING ARTICLE.



DESIGNED BY R. RIORDAN.

OUR first two articles dealt chiefly with the difficulty which was experienced in getting good and artistically useful glass, and the wonderful success which has been arrived at. But, given good glass, it by no means follows that you will have a good window. Artistic acquirements and faculties of a very high order are as requisite as the material itself. Few people, even of those who are continually handling color, have the color sense; and yet this is more necessary in dealing with stained glass than with anything else. The entering light carries every color up to such a pitch that discords, which would be scarcely noticeable in work seen by reflected light, are unbearable in stained glass. "The ancients," says M. Bontemps, "with the palette that we call incomplete, produced effects of harmony to which we have not yet attained. People have imagined that this was owing to the quality of their colors, while it was really the result of the well-balanced powers of the different

colors, and of their artistically combined oppositions." According to M. Labarte, the success of the mediæval glass-stainer was due to "the skilful arrangement and harmonious distribution of his colors." "A knowledge of the relative values of tones" is reckoned by Viollet-le-Duc as the first requisite of success in stained glass. As the blending of tones cannot be carried to any great degree of accuracy or refinement, it is all the more essential that each piece of glass should be chosen with reference to its effect on every other. What is known as the orchestration of color, i. e. the massing of color harmonies,—attempted by very few painters on canvas,—is almost necessary in glass. In color, again, as in music, there are harmonies which cross and blend; others, of which the component notes are scattered apparently at random throughout the composition. In work like stained glass the absence of these implied harmonies is at once felt, for only by them can the colorist reach the expression of infinity. But it goes without saying that genius only is capable of supplying all this. Bontemps is right, therefore, when he says that the one thing needed for modern glass painting is a great artist. And yet it could hardly seem likely, when the difficulties peculiar to the art are taken account of, that an artist, great or small, could be found to take it up. It is, as has already been shown, an art in which the painter's skill is as nearly as possible useless; in which nothing is to be gained with facility but brilliancy, and that is more likely to be attributed to the material than to the artist.

It is impossible to overrate the difficulties involved. The distant appearance of a work may be wholly different from what one would expect from a near view. Everybody has noticed the effect of a bright light coming from behind a dark object, in apparently eating it away or

reducing it to a shadow. Trees and branches seen against a sunset are an example. If the light is confined on all sides, this effect is much stronger. When a figure or other subject of a window is not positively outlined, shaded vigorously, and exaggerated, rather than the reverse, as to movement and expression, it becomes, when the window is in place, weak, confused, and unintelligible. It is, as it were, melted down in light. The French artists of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries understood this, and used their lead outlines with a boldness which showed

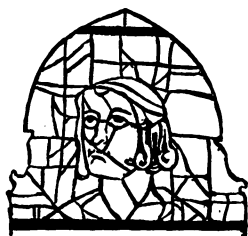


Fig. 1. — PORTRAIT OF HENRI DE MEZ. CHARTRES, THIRTEENTH CENTURY.

their thorough acquaintance with the conditions of their art. In the head of Henri de Mez (Fig. 1), which we reinsert for convenience from our first article, the heavy line across the face serves at a distance but to mark the prominence of the cheek-bone on one side and of the muscles of the cheek and jaw on the other. The lines which cross the forehead and the neck are similarly reduced to shades, marking what a modern painter would call the great planes of the head. If the illustration is held at a distance of a couple of yards from the eye, something of this effect will be given by the radiation of reflected light from the white spaces between the lines. In the original, the light coming through must act much more sensibly. The background, which is of red glass, has been purposely made up of little bits, so that the multiplied lines of leading might reduce the glare of light and tone the color. Viollet-le-Duc gives some striking illustrations of the power of light to modify forms in this manner.<sup>1</sup> Color is affected by it in as great a degree. Some colors, more radiant than others, are spread over the latter as a glaze by the light. Red, in the Chartres windows, is purpled by the neighborhood of light blue. Our modern blues are not radiant enough to distribute themselves with any great effect over surrounding colors, but the yellow stain, the most brilliant color now in use, does so very perceptibly. The ancient reds, which are quite black near by, are brilliant and striking when seen far off. And, *per contra*, our modern blue-grays and purples are apt to look muddy, slaty, or obscure when seen a hundred feet away.

The position of a window is also of the utmost consequence. An unobstructed front view is not always desirable. In modern churches a great deal of light is considered necessary, and of the many devices of the old masters for reducing and confining it, most are at times inadmissible. If very heavy glass is used, enamel paint must be eschewed, and likewise very small leading. If form is of great importance, and much leading or enamelling is necessary, correspondingly thin glass is required. We cannot, unless in exceptional instances, use rich-toned glass, close leading, and strong shading, with dark enamel. Hence advantage should be taken, whenever possible, of intervening pillars, hanging lamps, carved screens, and whatever else may diffuse the glare of light, and compel one to look obliquely through the glass, which obviously is equal to a thickening of the glass. Mr. Tiffany, to this end, systematically inserts his glass at different angles in the leading. But, if position is important in more or less pure mosaic, it is still more so when enamel is used in any quantity. The windows in St. Thomas's Church, New York, which are about as good specimens as can be found of the sort of work which was most admired here until recently, would not look nearly so bad as they do if they had been properly designed for the place and the light which they are in. They are pretty completely covered with enamel. The two side windows are much lighter than the centre, which sets back of them,—a good plan enough in mosaic, but always dangerous in enamel. Here, at least, as the dark central window, on account of the orientation of the church, receives only a side light, while the sun enters directly through one of the side windows, this arrangement has proved admirably calculated to bring out all the defects of the enamel method in the most striking manner. The central window looks like a badly done mural painting, through which absolutely no light at all seems to pass. Its dulness, instead of helping the rich color around by contrast, effectively destroys it by spreading over it a dirty brown obscurity rather than a light, in which,

<sup>1</sup> In *Dictionnaire de l'Architecture Française, Art. Vitrail*.





too, Mr. St. Gaudens's exquisite groups of angels in relief are as much lost as if they were packed away in a basement. These windows are of French manufacture, and it would be interesting to know if their designer would have done any differently had he been aware of the position which they were to occupy. Mr. Tiffany's mosaic work, in which the forms may be said to be moulded in thick glass, or are put together from small pieces so as to have adequate relief without requiring to be touched with the brush, would take away the breath of any modern European glass-stainer. And Mr. La Farge's management of enamel on mosaic in important figure work is just as much beyond all contemporary competition.

It is easy to sin in the use of enamel color. No one but a master of both drawing and color can hope to use it advantageously. Every touch of the brush dulls the color of the pot-metal in modifying it; and, if large unpainted spaces are not reserved, the work is ruined. On the other hand, if the painted and unpainted portions are not made to balance and sustain one another, the work is equally ruined. The firing of the enamel is as delicate and risky a process as any used in the arts. Most colors undergo changes in firing, and it is of the utmost concern that they should be burnt to just such a tint, and no longer. A practical acquaintance with all the work of the glass-house is as essential as the artist's skill and judgment in the designing, and without both the best work in this style cannot be produced.

It is unquestionable that in small work of simple design enamel should not be used at all. To belabor a small screen or window-light with painted decoration in the English style is to spoil good or middling glass, and to throw away work. Where the highest decorative results are aimed at, or a certain degree of realism is required, as in the Harvard window, and where the texture of the glass cannot, on account of size and distance, be conspicuous, the covering of some portion of the window by vigorous shading with enamel may be of the greatest benefit, even in a decorative sense, for it tends to intensify the

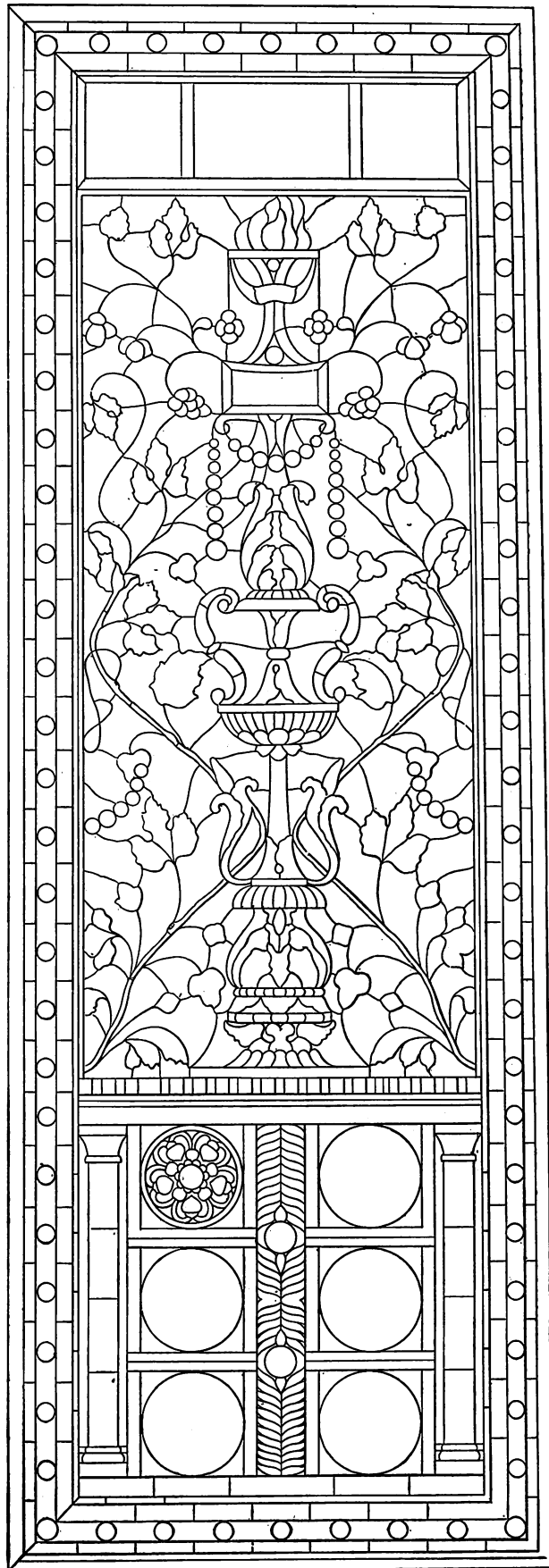


Fig. 2. — REDUCED WORKING DRAWING OF A WINDOW IN PURE MOSAIC.  
BY JOHN LA FARGE.



light and color in the portions left uncovered. But in the case just mentioned,—in the case of small work which may be examined part by part,—nothing can make up for the loss of color and the hiding of the material which is involved. In this sort of work the style should always be the pure mosaic. There need be no lack of variety. Besides the endless combinations of geometrical forms, derivable from mediæval designs, the Arabesque and Japanesque systems of abstract ornamentation are in practice drawn upon by all our designers. Mr. La Farge has led off (Fig. 2) with Renaissance designs in pure mosaic, of one of which we give a fac-simile of the working drawing. The simple shapes of the lower animals and plants are easily imitated in this manner. Their forms may be indicated by the leading alone, or may be rendered with an almost illusive naturalness by the choice of wrinkled, bulging, or concave pieces of glass, as is done by Mr. Tiffany. Many of the lower marine animals would make peculiarly good subjects, as their bodies are often transparent or diaphanous, and beautifully tinted. The reproduction of simple artificial objects is likewise allowable, and may be made very interesting, as is shown by the pretty designs in the New Casino at Newport. Even in the case of the largest and most important work, the benefits conferred by enamel are, for the most part, obtainable also in mosaic. The partial opacity which it gives, at some artistic cost, can be got in the glass itself without any loss of surface quality. The legitimate use of enamel is thus reduced to the gaining of additional form by vigorous drawing in dark hatchings over the colored and self-shaded pot-metal. Its use in other ways can be defended only on business grounds, not on artistic.

The attention paid in our country to these requirements and capabilities of the art seems, with all drawbacks, to be greater than that bestowed on them anywhere else at present, and marks the inception of a distinctively American school of stained glass. If the progress so far made is equalled in the future, it is easy to see that no foreign competition need be dreaded. Ten years ago there was hardly a bit of good glass made in the country: to-day we produce better glass than has been made since the sixteenth century, and some that has hardly been equalled since Roman times. Quite recently it was found impossible to have a fine figure-subject properly treated. The very parties who failed then would probably carry it out successfully now, such has been the force of the general tide of improvement. Our workmen are as skilful as any; our public are rapidly becoming educated to appreciate good work; and, for the first time since the revival of the art, it has been taken up by artists of acknowledged power. Both Mr. La Farge and Mr. Tiffany are born colorists, and each of them has a profound acquaintance with all forms of decorative design. As is usual with "those who know," their influence is one, although their differences are all the more striking, because their methods grow out of the same root,—an appreciation of what is and what is not ornament. Mr. Tiffany's Oriental leanings are well known. He is in favor of the boldest, strongest, most telling method. He never hesitates to join cloth of gold to cloth of frieze, to inlay rough-cast with fine marbles, or to use the cheapest along with the most gorgeous glass, when an artistic result may be secured. He is without any touch of the "literary sort of thing." He speaks, as nature does, through the eye to the mind and the feelings, in a manner which is too little understood at present. The effect of color on the emotions, the food for thought which may be conveyed by the simple presentation of natural form, are not generally appreciated to the full by modern artists, who very often seem to aim at results which can only be obtained in literature. Mr. Tiffany handles his theme as boldly and naturally as he does his material. His way of regarding his subject implies his *technique*. He has carried the use of pure mosaic farther, perhaps, than it has ever been carried before. It used, for example, to be a question whether landscape motives were admissible in stained glass. It was said, justly enough, that in a window, as in any flat decoration having such intimate structural relations, every portion must come out to the same plane, and in appearance as in reality contribute to the support of the whole. Nothing must appear to lie behind or be detached from another. It was thought that

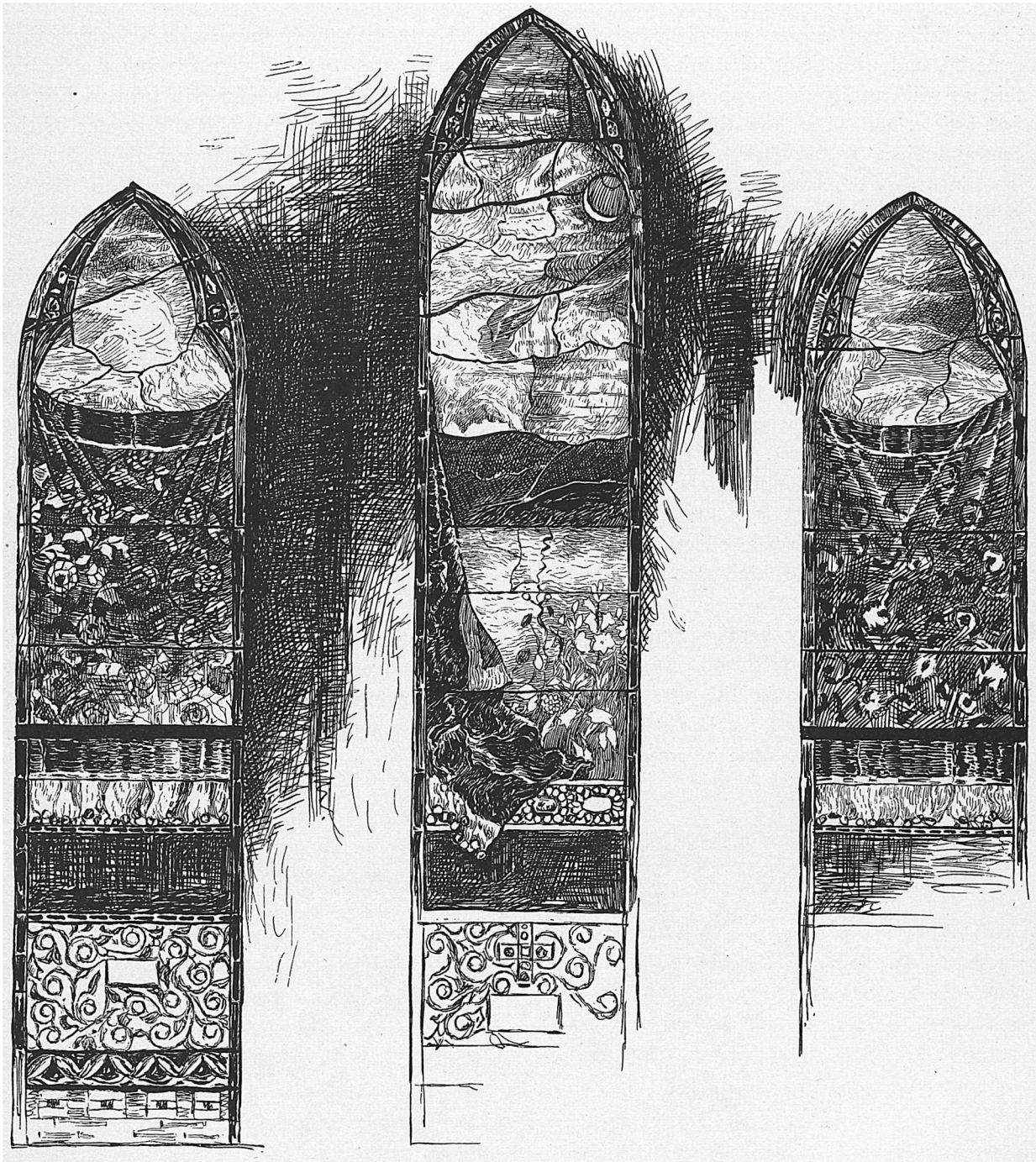


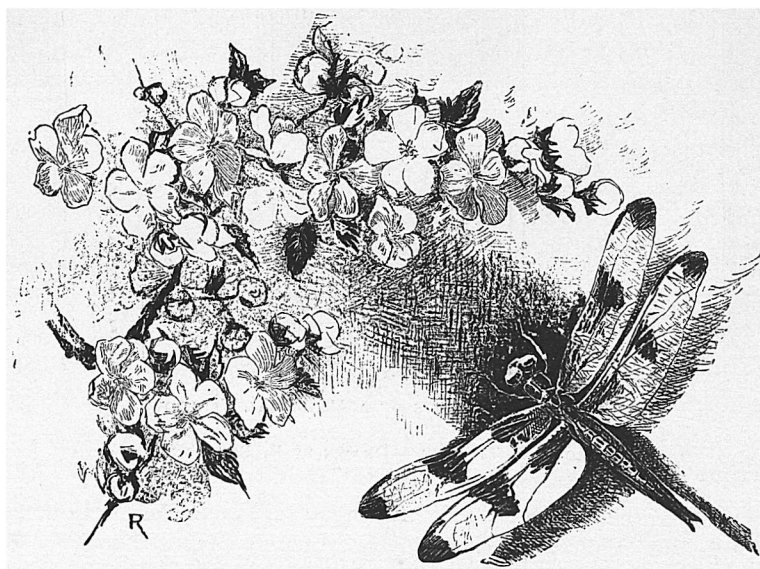
Fig. 3.—THREE LIGHTS OF A MEMORIAL WINDOW.

BY LOUIS C. TIFFANY.—DRAWN BY R. RIORDAN.

landscape, depending so entirely on the expression of distance for all its higher effects, was in consequence out of the province of stained glass. But Mr. Tiffany has shown that it is fully within the scope of the most severe and legitimate mosaic work, and, further, that many of the most beautiful and poetic passages of landscape can be better represented in glass than in paint. Effects of rippled or quiet water, sunset and moonlight clouds, mysterious involutions of distant hills and woods, are given with a force and suggestiveness impossible in any other material, and without at all diminishing the solidity or decorative value of the window. To do this, as will readily be supposed, requires the subtlest art. If the reader will turn to Fig. 1, first article, and note how the figure of the angel is firmly connected with the border of the central subject by the dark halo which passes partly over it, and by the diagonal line of leading run across the larger part of the border, and how the wings are joined by masses of similar value to the frame of the window, he will perceive one means much used by the ancients of preserving the appearance of solidity, while giving air and space to the composition. The figures in this window have been described to me as absolutely floating in air, and yet strongly held and sustained in their place. In the "egg-plant window" of Mr. Tiffany (Fig. 5, first article), it is easily seen that the same principle of tying together the different parts of the composition has been carried out in various ways. The bands of pale yellow glass which represent a lattice are admirably used for this purpose, and even the striæ and corrugations of the pieces of opalescent glass which form the background are so disposed as to help to bind the whole thing together. In Fig. 3 of the present article the central light is mostly filled with a landscape, which, though in the original full of light and air, is perfectly well held in place. Mr. La Farge has not yet attempted in mosaic what Mr. Tiffany has, but in his Harvard window a distinct landscape effect, though of an extremely simple character, has been produced: In all attempts of the kind "opal" glass is invaluable as a means of giving sunlight and atmosphere.

I believe that only here is much thought given at the present day to the considerations which I have pointed out; and it follows that, if we are indebted to foreigners and to foreign work for our first start in the art, we can now apply Winston's words to ourselves, and claim that we have beaten our teachers, even if we should be too grateful to forget what we owe them, and too polite to raise a laugh at their expense.

R. RIORDAN.



DESIGNED BY R. RIORDAN.